

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6979

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK, PINT

SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT DEBATES INDUSTRIAL CRISIS

1. SUMMARY: UNCERTAIN AS TO HOW PUBLIC SENTIMENT IS SHAPING UP, THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION SPARRED WARILY YESTERDAY AT THE OPENING OF AN EMERGENCY TWO-DAY DEBATE ON THE CURRENT INDUSTRIAL CRISIS. ALTHOUGH BOTH MEN SOUGHT TO PORTRAY THEIR RESPECTIVE APPROACHES AS REASONABLE AND CONSTRUCTIVE, THE EXCHANGE SERVED MAINLY TO HIGHLIGHT ANEW HOW DEEP AND INTRACTABLE ARE THE ISSUES DIVIDING THIS NATION.
END SUMMARY

2. THE PRIME MINISTER OPENED YESTERDAY'S DEBATE IN A
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DELIBERATELY SOMBER, LOW-KEY MANNER, CITING FACTS AND

FIGURES TO JUSTIFY THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO PUT THE ECONOMY ON A THREE-DAY WORK WEEK. THIS ACTION, HE INSISTED, HAD BEEN FORCED SOLELY BY THE REDUCTION IN COAL OUTPUT AND THE CONSEQUENT THREAT TO POWER SUPPLIES AND STEEL PRODUCTION. HE FORCEFULLY DENIED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS SEEKING A CONFRONTATION WITH THE MINERS, BUT REAFFIRMED ITS DETERMINATION TO DEFEND STAGE THREE. HE REVIEWED THE UNPRECEDENTEDLY GENEROUS WAGE PACKAGE BEING OFFERED TO THE MINERS AND URGED THEM IN THE NAME OF REASON AND MODERATION AND IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST TO ACCEPT IT. HE CONCLUDED WITH A VAGUE OFFER TO MEET WITH THE CBI AND THE TUC TO "LOOK AT THE FUTURE AND PLOT OUR COURSE TOGETHER."

3. HAROLD WILSON, LEADING OFF FOR THE OPPOSITION, SAID THE GOVERNMENT WAS "IN A DEAD END OF ITS OWN CREATING." HE ACCUSED HEATH OF SEEKING TO MAKE SCAPEGOATS OF THE MINERS FOR HIS OWN MISTAKES. THE GOVERNMENT'S CURRENT EMERGENCY MEASURES, HE SAID, WERE DESIGNED TO MAXIMIZE PUBLIC FEELINGS AGAINST THE MINERS, NOT TO COPE WITH THE CRISIS. HE CALLED ON HEATH TO MAKE A FRESH START -- TO TAKE ANOTHER LOOK AT "WAITING AND WINDING TIME" AS A WAY OUT OF THE IMPASSE. HE ALSO URGED HIM TO INVESTIGATE FURTHER A TUC OFFER THAT OTHER UNIONS WOULD NOT USE A SETTLEMENT WITH THE MINERS ABOVE STAGE THREE TO JUSTIFY SIMILAR WAGE CLAIMS -- AN OFFER THE PM TREATED WITH CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM. WILSON CONCLUDED WITH AN EMOTIONAL TRIBUTE TO THE MINERS AS DEMOCRATS AND PATRIOTS THAT BROUGHT HIM LOUDER CHEERS FROM HIS OWN BACKBENCHERS THAN HE HAS HEARD IN A LONG WHILE.

4. JEREMY THORP*, SPEAKING FOR THE LIBERALS, OBSERVED THAT THE ASSUMPTIONS OF ECONOMIC GROWTH UNDERLYING STAGE THREE HAD ALREADY BEEN INVALIDATED BY EVENTS. HE SAID A NEW AND MORE RESTRICTIVE WAGE NORM WAS NEEDED, BUT THAT IT WOULD ALSO HAVE TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE IN PROVIDING FOR SPECIAL CASES SUCH AS THE MINERS. THOUGH COMMONS HAD NEARLY EMPTIED BEFORE THORPE ROSE TO SPEAK, HIS ENTIRE PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION OF TEN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WAS ON HAND TO HEAR HIM -- A RARE AND DELIBERATE DISPLAY OF UNITY DESIGNED TO OFFSET RECENT PRESS REPORTS OF ROWS WITHIN THE PARTY (LONDON'S 367). THIS DID NOT PROTECT THORPE, HOWEVER, FROM THE MERCILESS HECKLING OF LEFT-WING LABORITES WHO DREW UNKIND COMPARISONS BETWEEN HIS OWN EARNINGS AS A COMPANY EXECUTIVE AND THOSE OF A COAL MINER.

5. COMMENT: THE BIG QUESTION MARK HANGING OVER
YESTERDAY'S DEBATE WAS PUBLIC OPINION. MPS ON BOTH
SIDES OF THE HOUSE, ESPECIALLY THOSE FROM MARGINAL
CONSTITUENCIES, ARE CLEARLY UNEASY ABOUT THE OUTCOME
OF ANY GENERAL ELECTION THAT MIGHT BE CALLED IN THE
PRESENT SITUATION. IT IS A FINE CALCULATION WHETHER
MOUNTING POPULAR RESENTMENT WILL GO AGAINST THE TRADE
UNIONS OR THE GOVERNMENT, AND FEW POLITICIANS FEEL
THEY HAVE ANY CLEAR READING ON THE PUBLIC MOOD AS YET.SOHM

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